

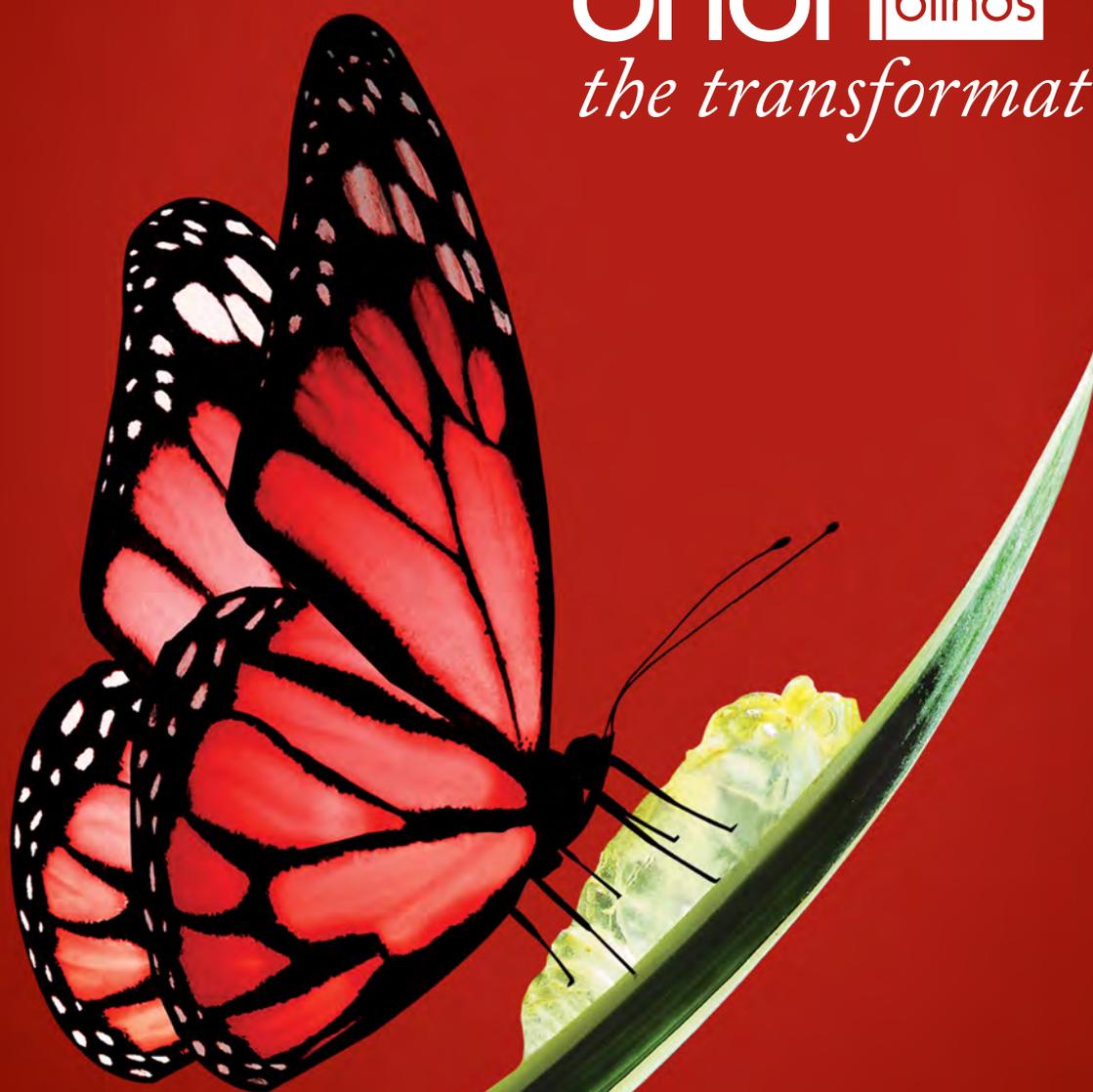
WINDOW

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FURNISHINGS

A U S T R A L I A

orionblinds
the transformation



Plus

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+ *Sheer delight* - new trends & products

+ *Retail vox pop* - what's selling?



NEW HORIZONS *for Orion Blinds*

Celebrating ten years of business this year, Orion Blinds has rebranded, boosted its marketing clout and positioned itself for growth, writes Belinda Smart.

WHEN ORION BLINDS took up its stand at the Super Expo 2013 earlier this year, it did so with a marked sense of buoyancy; this is a company that has a lot to talk about at the moment.

For one thing this year marks its tenth year of operation as a wholesale manufacturer of contemporary, high quality window furnishings.

The expo also saw the unveiling of Orion's new branding, underpinning its strategy to position itself as a passionate supporter of leading edge, exclusively Australian made product, with a service profile to match.

Notwithstanding a decade in business, Orion is proud of a collective expertise that extends much further, equivalent to 40 years, across both retail and wholesale environments, as marketing manager Evan Harding confirms. And the company's solid year on year growth is also worth noting. To date Orion has grown to an operation boasting over 40 specialist staff and over 3000 square metres of production facilities at its Alstonville NSW head office, from where it services the entire Australian market.

Harding says Orion Blinds has evolved over the years to the stage where it is now well positioned to offer an "extensive and ever evolving product range" that includes blinds, awnings and shutters, all of them custom made in Australia.

"Utilising the most advanced componentry, technologies and fabric suppliers from around the world, our objective is to offer a standout product range as well as unrivalled levels of customer service, short and reliable turnaround times for stocked items; and full fabric ranges in stock and on the floor, from high recall brands such as Texstyle and Louvolite."

All this made for a compelling narrative to promote to the marketplace at Super Expo.

Harding explains that the company's re-branding, including a new logo, tag line "hung up on perfection", not only distilled its offer and refocused its energies, but was also designed to announce to the marketplace that Orion Blinds had undergone a "significant transformation."

Including a new website, collateral, corporate films, as well as new sales and marketing support, in the form of new swatches and Orion branded Louvolite & Ricky Richards books, the rebrand represents the company's "core values of trust, reliability and high quality products," he says.

"In utilising The Super Expo 2013 for the official launch of the new branding, Orion was making a definite statement.

The expo allowed us to show our customers how we are doing things differently these days.

Our stand was a deliberate statement of intent; no products, just people, really emphasising our service culture and human side. We're not just a collection of factories 'churning it out.'" This approach paid off, he adds. "The Expo was a brilliant forum in which to re-launch the Orion re-brand and resulted in a number of hot leads that are we are now proud to call customers."

Underpinning its new positioning, 2013 also saw the company installing a new sales and marketing team, complementing its existing customer service team. Janet Bowden has been appointed national sales manager and is described as "a highly experienced sales professional who brings fresh ideas to the industry"; Andrew Lebeter has taken on the role of key account executive, "a long-time industry player, with a great knowledge of internal and external product solutions";

Sandra Bannister is Orion's internal sales representative – "the outbound contact expert, brilliant at listening to the needs of our customers". Sherree Wightman is the company's customer service manager, described as the voice of Orion; while Linda Wightman and Tanya Garrett, also in the customer service area, are tasked with "fostering superb relationships with all our customers."

Meanwhile Harding himself as marketing manager is a seasoned marketer bringing experience from a range of industries including automotive, financial, tourism and hospitality.

With the new team providing enhanced energy, focus and direction, new processes and procedures have also been implemented, to optimise product development outcomes, Harding confirms.

"There is now a thorough and structured new product development process in place to make every product launch a success, from testing to hand samples, everything has to be in place before a launch can happen."

"Utilising the most advanced componentry, technologies and fabric suppliers from around the world, our objective is to offer a standout product range as well as unrivalled levels of customer service, short and reliable turnaround times for stocked items; and full fabric ranges in stock and on the floor, from high recall brands such as Texstyle and Louvolite."

"New product development is an ongoing process at Orion Blinds," he adds.

"Although the Super Expo did give us a focal point to announce a few products, we are in fact launching them as and when they are ready and demanded by the market."



ALUMINIUM SHUTTERS

TO DATE THE YEAR 2013 HAS SEEN A NUMBER OF ORION LAUNCHES:

Australian Made Aluminium Shutters – “custom made by Orion, allowing a great quality product to be made with a short turnaround time”

eZip Awning – a ‘no frills’ fighting brand – aimed specifically at those end users that want a cost effective screening solution

Vision Blinds – an elegant and stylish roller that allows an easy transition between light diffusion and dim-out – creating a useful and attractive alternative to the standard roller

Soft Rise Roller Blinds – a safety oriented spring operated roller blind that is simple to use and install

New Louvolite Fabric Collections – the full range of new fabrics is stocked by Orion

New Textstyle Fabric Collections – “our bread and butter range, and always in stock”

New Ricky Richards Outlook & Docril Collections described as “stylish but durable outdoor fabrics”



Meanwhile further releases in the pipeline include: Acmeda Ilios Series Awnings comprising high quality Wire Guide and Pivot Arm awnings; and a range of mix and match soft furnishings to enhance and complement customers' window coverings selections.

Orion's approach to product development is strongly influenced by a drive to innovate, says Harding. "New product development at Orion is now a formalised process of research, testing, sales and marketing material and client training. We only release a product when we know it's ready for the market."

He adds that the latest automated manufacturing technologies, from ultrasonic cutting machines to automated vertical blind cutting machines, along with cutting edge fabrics and fashions, are central to the company's approach. "Manufacturing aluminium shutters and the eZip Awning are more examples of how we like to work, creating new products that not only inspire end users but fuel their demand for the product, which really benefits our retail customers."

To further enhance Orion's market relations, online ordering now facilitates the majority of orders taken by the company, "which makes our clients' lives easier, and streamlines our administration time."

"Orion heavily invested in the process because we could see the benefit to our customers and staff alike. Orion also believes in creating strong and beneficial relations with our suppliers."

Providing long term commitment provides a trust and belief in their products, which they then reciprocate back to Orion. For example, Orion fully supports the Textstyle and Louvolite fabric ranges, so we stock their entire range, on the floor. And our buying power allows us to negotiate price efficiencies that get passed on to our customers."

While clearly Super Expo was a high point for the company, Orion's commitment to communicating with the market is ongoing. The company currently holds retail roadshows every six months, with plans to increase their frequency as demand grows, he confirms.

"Our last show, 25 Ways to Sell Summer, brought together 45 retail businesses with five world class suppliers – Acmeda, Hunter Douglas, Ricky Richards, Somfy and Uniline – and focused on our awnings and shutters."

Going forward, Harding says the company will continue listening to customers and their end users requirements and continuing to roll out the Retail Road Shows with Internal Solutions next on the schedule.

The level of attention invested in such activities supports Orion's commitment to fostering long term relationships. "We at Orion Blinds want to see our customers benefit from selling our brand."

When you become an Orion customer you can expect a high quality product, ongoing personalised service, product training, sales and marketing support, and an attentive customer service team. Orion provides the tools needed by our customers to run their businesses effectively."

"These days there is growing downward pressure on prices in the plantation shutters category, due to the emergence of imported product. however the important thing to note is that our shutters won't warp or bend and they're finished to the highest standards to ensure that paint retains its integrity. they're built to last, as an integral part of the home."

Over the long term, Orion Blinds' key objectives include continued growth and product development, backed by thorough testing.

"We're committed to becoming a serious player in the marketplace, offering real and tangible benefits for our customers."

"Orion Blinds has always offered an evolving range of products that best suit the demands of the marketplace. We are not afraid of new product development, and in fact actively embrace it as part of our future direction and brand differentiation. However, our underlying focus has always been the level of customer service that we offer, especially our strict, year-round, turnaround times."

"We're always looking to the future and for ways to innovate, from the latest automated manufacturing technologies to trendsetting fabrics and fashions."

With new products, a new team, a new focus and a new brand, we want to let our customers know that we really are committed to improving their bottom line and that we stand by our principles of quality and reliability. Our new logo and coordinated sales and marketing support really emphasise our belief in leading the way."



ILIOS PIVOT ARM